

## Food, Land, and Power: The Emergence of Indigenous Chefs and Restaurants in Canada

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**ABSTRACT:** Toronto has over 8000 restaurants, and until October 2016 only one offered Indigenous cuisine. Now there are three more. Why have there been so few Indigenous restaurants in the past, and what does this reveal about the relationship between food, land, and political power in a settler country like Canada? This paper addresses food as both a tool of Canadian colonialism and of Indigenous resistance. It focuses on political power relations behind the representation of Indigenous cuisines. Although four is still a tiny number for Canada's largest city, it does show how Indigenous chefs and restaurateurs are reclaiming foodways and their representations in urban centres. Chefs — such as Rich Francis' 'Cooking for Reconciliation', who was the first Indigenous contestant on *Top Chef Canada* and David Wolfman's 2015 You are Welcome Food Truck — are using food to take back cultural power.

There are over 8000 restaurants in Toronto, Canada's most populous city (Toronto Restaurants 2018). Until the Pow Wow Café opened in 2016, only one offered Indigenous cuisine: Tea-N-Bannock. However, in 2017, two more Indigenous restaurants opened: NishDish Marketeria and Küküm Kitchen. Why have there been so few Indigenous restaurants in the past, and why are more opening now? What does this reveal about the relationship between food, land, and power in a settler country like Canada? In efforts made by Indigenous communities to reclaim languages, traditions, health, and culture, food plays a central role. Food is an affective connection that binds and represents cultural difference and land. It is a site of debates regarding conflicting cultural beliefs over what is fit to eat. Therefore, restaurants are equally venues for cultural exchange and expressions of identities as they are distributors of food. Restaurants are able to influence perceptions of Indigenous food cultures and how these change in relation to political conditions and historic events. This paper surveys food as a tool of Canadian colonialism and of Indigenous resistance. Focusing on political power and power relations between settler and Indigenous cuisines, I begin by discussing how a food truck promoted awareness of the Indigenous heritage of Toronto. I then provide a summary of how the Canadian government previously used food to further colonization, and end with a discussion of how Indigenous chefs are cooking for reconciliation.<sup>1</sup>

### *Gii Daa Namegoon (You are welcome)*

In July 2015, Toronto hosted the XVII Pan American Games, which take place in the Americas every four years.

A year before, the *Globe and Mail* published an opinion piece by the Toronto Games' chairman and former Premier of Ontario, David Peterson. The article had the tone and volume of a pep rally. Peterson wanted Toronto to get really excited because, as Peterson wrote, 'Never before has Canada hosted a multi-sport event of this size' (Peterson 2014). His promises were as large as the games themselves: 'These games will change lives for the better. They will inspire young people, who may not otherwise consider sports, to get in the game, embrace fitness and build confidence' (Peterson). As Peterson claimed, the stakes were high: '[...] the world will be watching as we showcase this region and its incredible diversity and talents' (Peterson). The article mentioned spectators, from the United States to Brazil, and the excitement Peterson was confident 'all Canadians' would feel. However, he did not mention the official host First Nation: The Mississaugas of the New Credit.

Although now based southwest of Toronto, near Brantford, Ontario, the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of the New Credit includes Canada's largest city. The land was signed over to the British Crown in the 1787 Toronto Purchase, and then clarified in a second treaty in 1805. Land stretching from Ashbridges Bay to Etobicoke Creek, which encompasses the city core, was sold for ten shillings, which, in 2010 the *Toronto Star* converted to about \$60 Canadian (Edwards 2010). In 1986, former Chief Maurie LaForme filed a land claim that the Government of Canada settled in 2010 for the amount of \$145 million, a fairer estimate of how much the land was worth at the time of purchase at today's value (Edwards).

Like Peterson, the Mississaugas of the New Credit saw the PanAm Games as an opportunity. However, instead of imagining the sporting event as a chance to market the city, province, and country, this First Nation saw it as a chance to raise awareness of the land's original inhabitants. And they did so with food.

For the occasion of the games, the Mississaugas of the New Credit collaborated with Indigenous Chef David Wolfman on a food truck: The You Are Welcome Food Truck. The truck used food to tell different stories about Toronto and raise awareness of the city's Indigenous past. As Chief Bryan LaForme said to the *Toronto Sun*, 'Food is universal and it brings people together from all different cultural backgrounds. We are honoured to officially welcome people to our traditional territory this summer and invite everyone to taste delicious Aboriginal dishes' (DeMontis 2015). You Are Welcome, however, carries a double meaning. On the one hand, it welcomes athletes, their entourages, and those visiting the city for the games:

‘Welcome to Toronto,’ it says. On the other hand, it also speaks directly to local Torontonians. It says ‘You are welcome,’ in the sense of accepting the gratitude of those who do, and those who do not, acknowledge the Mississaugas of the New Credit as the traditional inhabitants of the land. The truck is as equally concerned with laying claim to land as it is with welcoming people.

Wolfman served four dishes: *curried elk pastry*, *‘nish kabobs — venison kabobs with birch, balsamic glaze* (nish is slang for Anishnawbe, which is the Ojibway word for people), *smoked turkey chilli*, and *wild blueberry bannock*. While the Mississaugas of the New Credit wanted to raise awareness of their traditional territory, Wolfman wanted to promote Indigenous cuisine. He had previously encountered reluctance to game meats in Canada, such as elk, which is why he decided to feature it (Wolfman 2017). Although not a restaurateur, Wolfman has been at the forefront of furthering Indigenous cuisine and its presence in Canada since he started a catering company specialising in what he called ‘Aboriginal Fusion back then — Indigenous Fusion these days [...]’ (Wolfman & Finn 2017, p. 1) in the 1990s. Wolfman is classically trained and, for more than two decades has been a culinary arts professor at George Brown College, Toronto, where he also studied from 1977–1980. In addition to wearing his chef whites, he hosted and produced eight seasons of *Cooking with the Wolfman* on the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN) from 1999–2012. And in 2017, he published his first cookbook: *Cooking with the Wolfman: Indigenous Fusion*.

A member of the Xaxli’p First Nation in Lillooet, British Columbia, he is based in Toronto, where he grew up in Regent Park as an ‘urban Native’ (Greer 2014). Wolfman describes his style of cooking as traditional with a modern twist. He markets his culinary persona as being an expert in Indigenous food and culinary arts. Both matter. As he writes in his cookbook:

To be clear, my recipes are not about making a meal out of whatever you can gather on a walk in the bush or about eating only those foods that were available in North America before the lost Spaniards reached the so-called New World in the fifteenth century — new to whom? My recipes are about taking the essence of indigenous ingredients and putting it under the spotlight. I blend the traditional with modern tastes and ingredients that are generally available in stores these days. This is the style of cooking that I call Indigenous Fusion (Wolfman & Finn 2017, p. 4).

His cooking is based on highlighting Indigenous ingredients, including wild game and plants, and preparing them with the tools and techniques of the culinary arts. But his recipes also borrow ingredients from other parts of the world, such as *Pomegranate Glazed Chicken Skewers* (pomegranates are native to a region that runs from Iran to northern India). Wolfman’s cooking is thus based in a particular

region, but not limited to it. Furthermore, his approach is deeply rooted in sharing, educating, and empowering. It is not just the food that matters, but what the food represents and how it connects people, land, and stories.

Wolfman made the recipes available on the You Are Welcome website, so even those who did not make it to the truck are able to still experience the food. This is typical of his approach to recipes. In an interview with *CTV News*, he speaks of an aunt who taught him:

[...] that the stories shared with you are given to you to share. They’re not given to you to keep [...] So a recipe I give you, it’s not a secret recipe [...] You’re going to take it and add your own things to it and share it with other people and so on. It stays alive that way (Greer, 2014).

Publishing the recipes online transformed them from one-off snacks to dishes that could be made again in different contexts and for different people. Sharing is essential, as it represents how food connects to and anchors community. It also becomes an ingredient. As Wolfman says, it is the people that season the food.

People say, ‘What kind of herbs did native people use?’ but when I talk to elders they always say that herbs were for medicine. They mixed it with oils and put on their skin for this or that. I did a lecture [...] and they said, ‘so the food was bland’, but that is not what I said. I said the emphasis was more on the feast; the actual gathering of people together, the sharing [...] (Armstrong 2010).

In addition to the physical aspects — food transfers nutrients, alleviates hunger, and gives pleasure — Wolfman’s approach represents something else that food does: it brings people together. It symbolises the feast. It materialises the gathering. Therefore, for Wolfman, it is not just how the food tastes but also what it does. The You Are Welcome Food Truck further reflected Wolfman’s emphasis on the importance of sharing by offering the dishes for free. The truck gave out 25,000 five-dollar gift cards (designed by Indigenous artist Tracey Anthony), which could be exchanged for one item on the menu. As Jennifer Bain wrote for the *Toronto Star*, ‘Free is good. Free for a good cause is even better.’ However, Wolfman says that some were sceptical. ‘What’s the gimmick?’ one man asked him (Wolfman 2017). After watching others line up and order, Wolfman says that the man eventually overcame his scepticism and decided to eat. However, this reluctance to something that is free is worth noting, as it brings up how food is valued.

The You Are Welcome Food Truck attracted press across the city that praised the project and described it as ‘a First Nations welcome to Toronto’ and ‘a good cause’ (Bain 2015). Food and land are present in these articles, but the politics are missing. For example, a popular Toronto blog, *She Does the City*, published ‘Wanna Try Aboriginal Cuisine?’ It opens with:

We like to think of ourselves as foodies, but it recently donned [sic] on us that we're pretty unfamiliar with Aboriginal cuisine. Sure, we've all had game meat dishes like buffalo burgers and elk roasts, and we've heard of bannock, but that about sums up our experience ('Wanna Try Aboriginal Cuisine?' 2015).

Instead of there being a specific reason for its absence (or erasure), Indigenous cuisine is presented as another cuisine to try, which circles back to the question of why there are so few Indigenous restaurants in Toronto, and the rest of Canada. The 2015 You Are Welcome Food Truck aimed to create an awareness of Toronto's Indigenous history (Toronto actually originates from a Wyandot word). However, it also revealed how much of this history has been erased. As the *She Does the City* review shows, by presenting Ojibway cuisine the food truck made some Torontonians aware of the absence of Indigenous cuisine in the city.

### Food and land

To study food is to study land. It is to study how land is worked and transformed, imagined and represented, bought, sold, won and lost, whom it belongs to, and who belongs to it. In a settler society like Canada, the relationship between food and land is political. Canadian literary scholar Margarey Fee begins *Literary Land Claims: The 'Indian Land Question' from Pontiac's War to Attawapiskat* with the question: 'How does literature claim land?' (Fee 2015, p. 1). Following Fee, I ask: how does food claim land? As Wolfman and the Mississaugas of the New Credit's You Are Welcome Food Truck exemplifies, food can be used to create an awareness of overlooked history. Culturally, land can be claimed and reclaimed through food. Access to food also plays a role in treaty settlements. Even though land is central to how Indigenous communities imagine themselves, and are imagined by others, and there is a deep connection between land and food since eating is one of the most intimate ways that we consume our environments, literally digesting it, there has been minimal visibility of Indigenous cuisines across Canada. It is exactly this absence that was the impetus for the You Are Welcome Food Truck. If there were more Indigenous restaurants, the truck would not have been necessary.

So why are there so few Indigenous restaurants in Canada? Before addressing restaurants — venues for the consumption of food — one must first consider food production, the laws that govern hunting, foraging, fishing, and agriculture, and whom they benefit. Frieda Knobloch begins *The Culture of Wilderness: Agriculture as Colonization in the American West* with a bold claim: 'Colonization is an agricultural act. It is also an agricultural idea' (Knobloch 1996, p. 1). The word 'colony', Knobloch explains, comes from the Latin *colonus*, which means farmer (Knobloch, p. 4). Although Knobloch focuses on the United States, Zoe Matties references her work in a

Canadian context in 'Unsettling Settler Food Movements: Food Sovereignty and Decolonization in Canada'. Matties writes: 'Although agriculture is responsible for more than its colonial past, understanding the ways that agriculture and colonization are connected helps to explain how the modern food system in North America continues to be tied to settler colonialism' (Matties 2016, n.p.). Matties underlines that, still to this day, Canada's food system is rooted in the colonization of Indigenous foodways. Sarah Carter studied the history of agriculture as part of Canadian colonization extensively in *Lost Harvests: Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy*. Focusing on western Canada, Carter begins by stating that the standard reason for the failure of agriculture was pinned to a lack of interest or ability by First Nations. The evidence she found proved otherwise:

It was the Indians, not the government, that showed an early and sustained interest in establishing agriculture on the reserves. Although the government publicly proclaimed that its aim was to assist Indians to adopt agriculture [...] government policies acted to retard agriculture on the reserves (Carter 1990, p. ix).

One example is an 1881 amendment to the Indian Act,<sup>2</sup> which prohibited Aboriginals from selling agricultural products in western Canada to prevent competition for settler farmers (King 2012, p. 70).

Beyond controlling access to land, food sources, and the ability to participate in agriculture, the Canadian government also used the residential school system to break down traditional Indigenous foodways. Monica Bodirsky and Jen Johnson discuss this in 'Decolonizing Diet: Healing by Reclaiming Traditional Indigenous Foodways':

The circumscription and cessation of First Nations ancestral hunting and fishing grounds through treaties and reserves severely curtailed the viability of traditional subsistence activities, such as hunting and gathering. At the same time, the marginal location of many reserves (economically, politically, geographically, and agriculturally) enforced dependence on imported, processed Western foods which tended to be much higher in fat, carbohydrates, and sugar, and lowered their consumption of fruits and vegetables, relative to traditional subsistence diets (Bodirsky and Johnson 2008, n.p.).

The same dependence on 'commodity foods' was enforced in residential schools, where students were served small amounts of poor quality food, such as water-downed gruel. Many residential school survivors recount insufficient portions and pronounced hunger that led to malnutrition, something that Bodirsky and Johnson term 'food abuse'. Ian Mosby further reports that the Canadian government performed nutrition and medical experiments



in residential schools. Although he focuses on 1942–1952, Mosby concludes that these experiments continued to happen beyond this period (Mosby 2013). The last residential school closed in 1996. However, other measures of colonial rule are still intact today. For example, Bodirsky and Johnson identify industrial development and resource extraction as further weakening Indigenous foodways.

To return to the question of why there have been, and continue to be, so few Indigenous restaurants in Canada, one factor is found in the relationship between food and colonial control. Because of government regulations, Aboriginals were severely limited from participating in the production of food, let alone in commercial institutions based on its consumption. But this is changing. Despite the damage caused by historical policies and environmental degradation, Bodirsky and Johnson identify a renaissance of Indigenous knowledge. They confirm a connection between reclaiming traditional foodways and healing. Their study focused on community projects and workshops, mostly in Toronto, as well as Indigenous-penned cookbooks. They do not mention restaurants; however, the article is from 2008, a year when there was not a single Indigenous restaurant in Toronto.

### Restaurants and reconciliation

In English there are separate words for menu and map. In French there is only one: *la carte*. Historian Rebecca L. Spang points this out in *The Invention of the Restaurant: Paris and Modern Gastronomic Culture*. Restaurants are so naturalized that they are often thought about in unhistorical terms. However, in the public life of food, the restaurant is just one model (others include, inns, taverns, cookshops, cafés, etcetera). What differentiates one from another include fixed (or unfixed) mealtimes, individual versus group tables, the type of menu, fixed prices, and the range of food on offer. Restaurants are thus historical products. What is significant about the double meaning of *la carte* is how, like a map, the menu draws boundaries in which to imagine the space of the nation (Spang 2000, pp. 192–193). This begins to reveal the relationship between menus, place, and borders.

In 2010, Lily Cho, an English professor, published *Eating Chinese: Culture on the Menu in Small Town Canada*, in which she makes the point that “The menu textualises the food that is served” (Cho 2010, p. 52). Because a meal is time-based and temporal, the menu is the textual and material trace of a restaurant’s dishes. Cho writes about the agency of menus and how, in the instance of Chinese menus in Canada, they can be read as counter cultural texts. She argues that they need ‘to be read as informed by the dislocations of colonialism as well as the continuing difficulties of negotiating the assertion of otherness within a predominantly white cultural space and within the legacy of dislocation’ (p. 51). Cho writes about the ‘other’ in a settler context, but what about the native? It

is with this in mind that I approach Indigenous restaurant menus. Indigenous history in Canada can also be described as being dislocated by colonialism. This circles back to the example of the Mississauaugas of the New Credit who once inhabited Toronto. The dynamics of this dislocation are distinct from that of racialised immigrants, yet Indigenous restaurants also negotiate ‘the assertion of otherness within a predominantly white cultural space’ (Cho, p. 51). Therefore, to read a menu from an Indigenous restaurant is to read more than the dishes that are on offer. It is to read how an Indigenous restaurant culturally negotiates its place in settler-dominated cities. It is to read the dishes as stories about Indigenous traditions, histories, and resistance.

The potential of restaurants for Indigenous chefs can be found in the word’s origin. As Spang writes: ‘Centuries before a restaurant was a place to eat (and even several decades after), a *restaurant* was a thing to eat, a restorative broth’ (Spang 2000, p. 1). She later continues: ‘The word *restaurant* had historically been derived from a verb meaning “to repair” or “recuperate”’ (Spang, p. 52). This is further exemplified by the definition found in the sixth edition of the *Dictionnaire de L’Académie Française*, from 1835: ‘RESTAURANT, adj., that which restores or repairs strength. *restorative remedy. restorative portion. restorative food*’ (Spang, n.p.). Reconciliation is too based on restoration. Organized by the parties of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) was founded in 2008 and concluded in 2015 after releasing its final report and 94 calls to action to ‘redress the legacy of residential schools and advance the process of Canadian reconciliation’ (TRC 2015, p. 319). The report does not mention restaurants, but does mention food. One subsection is titled ‘Food: “Always Hungry”’ and further amplifies what Bodirsky and Johnson wrote about food acting as a measure of colonial rule in residential schools (TRC, p. 85). If food was used as a tool in assimilation through disciplining bodies and minds, then it can also be used as a tool of resistance, restoration, and reconciliation.

So what is an Indigenous restaurant? How might this be different from a ‘farm-to-table’ Canadian restaurant? Indigenous restaurants are diverse in terms of what dishes they serve, the experiences they provide, as well as their staff, ingredients, price points, décor, and customers. I focus on self-identified Indigenous restaurants that are located in urban centres. Although there have also been Indigenous restaurants on reserves since the 1890s, this paper focuses on restaurants in cities as they are venues for cultural negotiation and confrontations between Indigenous chefs and owners and Canadian settlers and regulations.

In 2008, the year of Bodirsky and Johnson’s article, there was not one Indigenous restaurant in Toronto. However, this had not always been the case. Duke Redbird, from Saugeen First Nation, opened the Eureka Continuum in 2000 in the sports bar The Coloured Stone, in Toronto’s Financial District. Despite the restaurant’s success,

Redbird explained to the *Toronto Star* that it closed in 2002 because of the new landlords' rent increase ('A taste of Fire Nations' 2000). There have been earlier Indigenous restaurants in other parts of Canada, such as Muckamuck in Vancouver in the 1970s, followed by Quilicum, and then the Liliget Feast House, run by Dolly and Annie Watts from 1995–2009. This history is significant, and largely overlooked in contemporary press covering Indigenous restaurants. Indigenous restaurants are not necessarily new; however, because of recent political and cultural developments between First Peoples, the Canadian government, and Canadian society at large, contemporary Indigenous restaurants are positioned in a different political, social, and cultural landscape as the ones that operated earlier. During the 1970s, when Muckamuck was open in Vancouver, residential schools were still operating. There was not the same national conversation about Indigenous history compared to 2015, when the TRC released its report, and 2017, when Canada's celebrations of its 150 birthday sparked discussions about who was and who was not celebrating.

A decade after the Eureka Continuum closed in Toronto, pastor Enso Miller opened Tea-N-Bannock in 2012 in Toronto's East End, ironically, right at the edge of Little India. Although Miller is not Indigenous, the restaurant is Indigenous-staffed and is linked to the community work of his church. One year earlier, chef Aaron Joseph Bear Robe, from the Siksika Nation in Alberta, opened Keriwa Café in Parkdale, a neighbourhood with the largest Tibetan community in Canada. Despite its positive reception, Robe closed the restaurant in 2013 to run a wine club. Shawn Adler, who also runs a catering company, opened the Pow Wow Café in October 2016 in Kensington market (a neighbourhood next to Toronto's Chinatown, which was historically a Jewish neighbourhood). Also a caterer, who has been serving traditional Anishnawbe food since 2005, Johl Whiteduck Ringuette opened NishDish Marketeria in April 2017 in Koreatown. Joseph Shawana, from the Wiikwemkoong Unceded Reserve on Manitoulin Island, Ontario, opened Küküm Kitchen in May 2017, in Pleasantville, a posh north Toronto neighbourhood. The neighbourhoods of these restaurants demonstrate the cultural diversity of Toronto, as well as the erasure of Indigenous history.

When the website *Toronto Food Trucks* covered the You Are Welcome Food Truck, one commenter did not like the sound of the menu. She asked where are 'the scone dogs, pizza scone, hamburger soup and INDIAN TACOS!' Don't go all gourmet.' (Food Trucks 2015). This brings up the issue of defining Indigenous cuisines, what is and isn't included, who it is for, and who has the power to decide. The dishes offered by the four Indigenous restaurants in Toronto are quite distinct and can be understood in two ways: those that claim Indigenous foods and those that reclaim Indigenous ingredients. Tea-N-Bannock and the

Pow Wow Café offer a mix of Indigenous ingredients, as well as post-contact dishes, such as bannock (a type of quick, flat bread introduced by Scottish settlers), which is the base for Indian tacos, a typical pow wow dish. Both restaurants have Indian tacos on the menu: meat or veggie *Navajo/Indian Tacos* at Tea-N-Bannock and *Beef Chili* or *Veggie Chili tacos with cumin sour cream* at the Pow Wow Café. The ingredients for bannock – white flour, lard or butter, sugar – are not native to the Americas and are 'commodity' foods that were introduced to reserves by the Canadian government. Although both menus also feature ingredients native to the Americas (such as a *Corn soup with smoked duck* at the Pow Wow Café, bison, elk, Arctic Char, and wild rice at Tea-N-Bannock), the Indian tacos remain the main attraction. By serving Indian tacos, both restaurants claim the dish as Indigenous.

NishDish and Küküm Kitchen offer different dishes. NishDish has baked bannock as a side, but it is not a main feature, and they do not offer fried bannock. Instead, NishDish promotes dishes with pre-contact ingredients, like *Elk with sweet cranberry coulis*, *Roasted Buffalo with house spices*, and *Hominy Corn Soup*. Bannock does not appear on Küküm Kitchen's menu at all. Instead, they offer an *Arctic Trio* of *Beet Cured Salmon*, *Seal Tartare*, and *Smoked Rainbow Trout*, *Elk Loin*, *Baby Carrots*, *Beets*, *Peas* and *Jerusalem Artichoke Velouté*, and *Caribou*, *Duchess Potato*, *Squash*, *Foraged Mushrooms*, with a *Braised Onion Purée*. Out of the four, Küküm Kitchen has the highest prices and is the only restaurant to offer a fine dining experience. Its dishes, with the exception of seal, closely resemble ones that have become common in farm-to-table Canadian restaurants. The difference is that by using them, Küküm Kitchen reclaims them as Indigenous ingredients. They are taking back ingredients that have been appropriated as Canadian. The same can be said about NishDish. Like the You Are Welcome Food Truck, the menus express an objective to educate diners and to spread an awareness of the original foods and peoples of the lands that are now Canadian. Bannock plays a tiny role in this at NishDish, and no role in the current Küküm menu.

Chef Rich Francis also keeps his distance from bannock. The owner of the Seventh Fire Hospitality Group isn't known for making Indian tacos. Instead his dishes include *Braised shredded moose leg*, *wild rice*, *mushrooms 'ragout'*, *Fire roasted deer ribs finished with a low bush cranberry muskeg 'bbq' sauce*, and *Buffalo prime rib cooked and covered with buffalo sage and cinnamon bark*. In an interview with CBC, Francis says 'There's nothing wrong with bannock' (Lynn 2016). Rather, the bone he picks with bannock is about representation, it is that it has '[...] this kind of preconceived notion that it is Aboriginal cuisine' (Lynn). One dish he has made than includes bannock is *Osoyoos Lake Sockeye salmon crusted with turmeric roots and wild ginger*, *fire roasted cabbage and bone marrow bannock salad*. Francis' practice as a chef is based on 'Cooking for Reconciliation,' a concept that also doubles as a hashtag

(Francis is very active on Twitter and Instagram). He largely works with pre-contact ingredients, reclaiming them as Indigenous and traditional. Originally from Fort McPherson, North West Territories, his mother is Haudenosaunee of the Tuscarora Nation and his father is Gwich'in. He is now based in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. After having graduated from the Stratford Chef School, Francis worked in fine dining, and then switched to studying and cooking with pre-contact ingredients. In 2014 he became the first Indigenous contestant on *Top Chef Canada*, and placed third, spreading both his name in the culinary world, as well as a greater awareness of Indigenous cuisines among television viewers. Since his time on *Top Chef*, Francis has been travelling across Canada, giving dinners (such as a collaborative dinner called 'Cooking for Truth and Reconciliation' with Chef Vikram Vij at My Shanti in Surrey, B.C. in January 2018), participating in events (such as 'Flavours of the North' in Ottawa in December 2017, as part of the Canada 150 cultural programme), and teaching workshops about how 'interaction with indigenous foods may create opportunities for reconciliation' (Francis 2017). Currently Francis is shooting a web series with Storyhive called *Red Chef Revival: A Travel Series About Food & Reconciliation*, and is about to publish a cookbook: *Closing the Gap: Truth and Reconciliation through Indigenous Foods*. On his website, he explains his cooking as: '[...] a candid journey toward Truth and Reconciliation using Indigenous foods to create a better understanding of precolonial Indigenous culture and the impact of colonization' (SeventhFire).

But there are certain ingredients that Francis is not legally allowed to serve. On November 13, 2017, he posted an image on Facebook of an ulu, the traditional Inuit knife, and chunks of meat.

I'm exhausted, angry and frustrated from being told what I can and can't serve on my menus [...] In 2017 Nothing has changed in over 150 years of colonialism and cultural genocide [...] I still have to 'hide' to serve Moose meat, muktuk, sea lion among other things. I face lengthy jail sentences and huge fine (\$70'000.00) if I get caught. Am I criminal for doing this? [...] it's infuriating that still today I have to go in isolation privately or pull back from what was original to accommodate to the rules and regulations of the Canadian government [...] Food as a weapon is very real, if you control the food you control the people [...]

The post was shared over 1,300 times. This returns to who has the power to define what can be legally served as Indigenous food, and how political power influences what a cuisine includes. Cooking for Francis is a way to decolonize diets and to reconnect with Indigenous stories, traditions, and lands. Although he has had plans to open a restaurant in Saskatoon, he is currently prioritising his other projects. Restaurant or not, Francis demonstrates the

potential of food for sparking difficult conversations, for healing, and for reconciling.

### Conclusion: The stories are the spice

Shane Chartrand, the Cree Executive Chef at Sage Restaurant at River Cree Resort and Casino in Enoch, Alberta, collaborated with Francis, as well as Christa Brunea-Guenther, the founder of Feast Café Bistro in Winnipeg, Manitoba, and member of Peguis First Nation, on a dinner in Vancouver on January 24, 2018. As part of the city's popular Dine Out festival, which offers fixed-menu prices at restaurants across the city, Edible Canada Chef Tobias Grignon organized an eight-course dinner with these three Indigenous chefs: *Vancouver World Chef Exchange – Indigenous Canada: The Wilds of Canada*. Although the title suggest a distance from urban life, it is significant that Dine Out shared their spotlight with Indigenous chefs based in other parts of Canada. Nearly two years before, on February 3, 2016, Chartrand spoke in Edmonton at Redx Talks, an Indigenous variation on the Ted Talks series. Chartrand discussed what he describes as 'progressive Indigenous Cuisine'. For him, Indigenous cuisine is 'ultimately Canadian cuisine.' His views are worth quoting at length.

[...] [young Aboriginal chefs] need to take on that responsibility of making it Canadian cuisine. First Nations, Aboriginal cuisine is a big, big part of who we are. It is a big part of the food and beverage world, of the culinary arts world. But why does it really matter? Some people will come up to me and say you're not saving lives. But the thing is we are saving lives because food is medicine. Food changes our attitude. Food changes who we are [...] I believe that we have a platform to take a moment to think about our food [...] and say maybe this is Canadian cuisine, this is what it's all about out, it's the spirituality and the way we eat it, not necessarily just what it is (Chartrand 2016).

By suggesting that Indigenous cuisine is Canadian cuisine, Chartrand is reclaiming Indigenous ingredients. This also returns to the question of what differentiates an Indigenous restaurant from a farm-to-table restaurant serving local Canadian fare. The food actually might not be different, but the stories are. As Chef David Wolfman says, it is the people and their stories that season the food. Although four Indigenous restaurants is still a tiny number for Canada's largest city, it does show how Indigenous chefs and restaurateurs are beginning to reclaim foodways, ingredients and their representations in urban centres. It also demonstrates the historical obstacles that prohibited more Aboriginals from both participating in commercial food production and the restaurant industry. Indigenous chefs — such as Francis' 'Cooking for Reconciliation' and Wolfman's You Are Welcome Food Truck — are using



food as a tool of resistance. For these chefs, food is a means for reclaiming culture, tradition, identity, language, health, and power. Cooking and restaurants are, thus, means to restore and reconcile.

### Biography

L. Sasha Gora is a writer and cultural historian with a focus on food history and contemporary art (often separately but sometimes together). In 2015, she joined the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society as a doctoral candidate, where she is researching the new Nordic food movement, contemporary Canadian cuisine, and reimaginings of Indigenous food cultures. Her writing has been featured in publications such as *Gather*, *Chickpea*, and *MUNCHIES: Food By Vice*. She has led workshops and lectured about food cultural history at institutions such as Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin and the Centre for Contemporary Art, Glasgow, and teaches at the Amerika-Institut at the University of Munich.

### Notes

1. I use Indigenous as an adjective, Aboriginal as a noun, and 'Indian' only when I am quoting other sources.
2. 'An Act respecting Indians' was first passed in 1876 in the Canadian parliament and is the act that still regulates relationships between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian government.

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